
DEPARTMENT OF ELECTIONS AND STATE

FINDING: The state currently has two departments headed by statewide elected officials which perform election functions. The Legislative Auditor's Office found the functions of these two departments overlap. Also, the Select Council on Revenues and Expenditures in Louisiana's Future (SECURE) recommended abolishing the Department of Elections and merging all election functions into the Department of State.

OPTION 1: Merge the Department of Elections and Registration with the Department of State.

Description And Background: In Louisiana, election functions are divided between the Secretary of State (chief elections officer) and the Commissioner of Elections. Before 1956, all election functions were within the Department of the State. In 1956, all duties were transferred to the Board of Voting Machines, which the Louisiana Constitution of 1974 later changed to the Department of Elections and Registration. (*See Appendix pp. 1-2*).

The Secretary of State is designated by the Constitution as the chief elections officer of the state. The Secretary of State administers all laws relating to elections, except voter registration and the custody of voting machines which the Constitution places under the administration of the Commissioner of Elections. (*See Appendix pp. 3-4*).

According to an audit of the Department of Elections and Registration conducted by the Legislative Auditor's Office (June 1996), there is some duplication of effort with the Secretary of State. Both departments work together on issues such as assembling and checking ballots and financing and obtaining reimbursements from the local government's share of expense.

In addition, the Select Council on Revenues and Expenditures in Louisiana's Future (SECURE) recommended consolidation of the two departments by placing all election duties in the Department of State and abolishing the Department of Elections and Registration. SECURE estimated that 10-15 positions could be eliminated by a consolidation, which would achieve savings of \$500,000 in administrative costs. According to the report, having two departments with elections functions results in fragmented elections activities, diffused accountability, and inefficient use of state funds. It may also confuse citizens who have questions or need to register to vote.

Estimated Fiscal Impact: SECURE estimated that 10-15 positions could be eliminated by a consolidation, which would achieve savings of \$500,000 in administrative costs. This is believed to be an extremely conservative estimate.

According to fiscal note preparations on several prefiled consolidation bills, the savings will be a minimum of \$1 million.

Action Required To Implement: Legislation to abolish the Department of Elections and transfer all duties to the Department of State. According to Article IV, Section 20 of the Constitution, such a consolidation would require a two-thirds vote of both houses of the legislature; however, this would not reduce the term of the incumbent commissioner of elections.